23: Franck--345 T-2 (1924) 1926 Laotians
116, 243, 343

"Little huts on stilts everywhere awaited the coming of laborers to the fields, lying fallow in grass now, but planted in July and harvested in November. There is no water for flooding at other times, because it does not rain enough, though with the industry and industry and ingenuity of the Chinese they could easily harness the rivers that run away toil-less to the distant sea. But there is no need to do so, because there is no such crowding and consequent hunger as in China and its slender little offspring, Annam."

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which form the private home of the house's inhabitants.

A sort of stairway without railings or a ladder gives access to the veranda from one of the short sides of the rectangle. Often a second ladder leads to a small uncovered platform [183] situated at the other end of the house. This, so to speak, is the service stairway, for the platform serves as a kitchen or storeroom and for various private uses.

Inside the house is divided into two parts by a longitudinal partition pierced by openings which give access to compartments used as bedrooms. The corridor [Illustration here] left free between the partition and the opposite wall constitutes the common room, and is provided with one or several rectangular hearths. The floor of the verandas, the bedrooms and the common room is covered with mats.

[352]

Furnishings are generally scanty, and consist of mattresses, pillows, cushions, footstools, low stools, blankets, chests, etc.

[343]

The space under the house serves as a stable or barn for horses and livestock, a poultry house and a pigsty. The animals are shut up there each night.

[286]

[184] Looms for weaving may be found either under the verandas or underneath the house.

[343]

The storehouse for paddy is found nearby. It is also mounted on piles and may be built in a rectangular or circular shape. The "hand" or "foot" mortars used to decorticate paddy may either be near the storehouse under an addition, or else under the house.

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[804]

The dimensions of houses are reckoned in Hon or units as long as the span of the arms (1.8 to two meters). Houses may be anywhere from two to eight or nine hons (4 to 20 meters) in length. Their width varies from two to three spans of the arms on the average (four to six meters), not including verandas.

Strictly speaking, the piles are columns which rise from the ground to the tie-beams of the roof trusses. Mortises are cut in them a meter of two above the ground, and the floor joists fitted into the mortises.

Even as they are, these houses resist high winds. They provide good shelter from the sun, rain, etc. and are sufficiently comfortable, even for Europeans. The latter often have to be contented with such houses and can find little fault with them except the instability of the floor and the narrowness of the windows, which makes the inside somewhat dark.

149: Reinach--182a G-3 (no date) 1901 AMI Indochina
Laotians AM8

343
291

Fig. 66 /p. 251/ Typical Lus.
(Courtesy of M. Besson)

Meo

516 progresses at an even, elongated pace, carrying as much as 30 kilo-
417 grams in his pack without even seeming to suspect the feats of strength,
[32] suppleness and balance which he accomplishes. As long as he remains on high ground his resistance to fatigue is very great indeed, but he cannot go down to the lowlands without danger, especially in the hot season.

101 Certain authors claim that the word "Meo" which, when pronounced with a certain intonation, means cat in several Indo-Chinese languages, was given to these folk by reason of their agility. However, we must note that in [109] Laotian the word "Meo" used to designate these mountainfolk is neither written or pronounced like the word meo which is used to designate cats. There is the same difference between these two words as there is in French between the words maitre and mètre.

342 A Meo house is built at ground level on slightly leveled ground. The walls are made of puddled clay or of ill-fitting boards, and the house is roofed with thatch or crudely-squared wooden shingles. The doors are made of wood which has been shaped with an ax, and there
[592] are no windows. Often several families live in the same house, and then each has a fireplace to itself and a compartment which serves it as a bedroom. In the common room there is an oven and fireplaces above which objects are placed to dry on a bamboo framework. Behind the house a narrow passageway is left free separating the
[343] building from the sheer mountainside. In front there is a narrow veranda where the horses are kept when they are not housed in a stable built on piles and overhanging the mountainside, as are the animal barn and pig sty, the rice granary and the goat pen. This system has the advantage of protecting the animals from the dampness of the ground, since the planks which form the floor jut out over empty space on their solid piles.

[101] Inside the house there are a few furnishings, as among all peoples of Chinese origin. There are benches, tables, camp beds, dishes,
352 iron and copper cooking utensils and opium smoking accessories, all
356 so repulsively filthy that even the least delicate would hesitate to enter and stay in these hovels, where vermin swarm under the protection of the ancestors' altar.

198 Although amongh themselves and with their families the Meos speak a rather unharmonious language, nearly all the men can under-
212 stand and speak Qouane-hoa, the language of the Chinese mandarins, which is the official language in Yunnan. They can neither read nor write Chinese characters, and have no system of writing of their own.

342 bedrooms separated from each other by partitions or curtains, the
[178] other is the communal room. In the space between the inner and outer beam, and not limited by the longitudinal partition, is the altar on which there are always one or several buddhas. It is placed on the side of the bedrooms, on the "soung" side of the dwelling, that is on the side opposite the entrance. The dimensions of the dwellings vary between six and twenty-four meters long by four to nine meters wide.

342 The houses are most often open to the east or to the north. They
823 may also overlook what is passing by in the streets or the paths and, as the case may be, the whole length of the river. For there is a superstition which forbids building "across the current," which is considered as unconquerable and invincible, and it would be dangerous to defy it.

343 The outhouses consist of an adjoining kitchen and a granary, a
[252] few meters removed from the principal dwelling. Near this granary is found the picturesque rice pestle (khok khao) which the women work with their feet.

343 [62] All the villagers participate in building the house. When the
476 propitious day and moment have been determined, the owner feeds everybody the whole time the house is being built.

Tattooing

301 Every self-respecting Laotian must be tattooed. The absence of
885 tattooing is a sign of mental and moral, therefore of social, inferiority.
562 As a general rule, however, the Laotian woman is not tattooed. This custom is found only among the women of Youan, Kha or Lu.

301 The Laotian is tattooed chiefly on his thighs, forearms and chest. The tattooing on the thighs is so close together that from a distance a tattooed man looks as if he were wearing close-fitting blue shorts. The Laotians are called "white bellies" as opposed to those who are tattooed down to the navel and are then called black bellies. The colors used for tattooing are indigo blue, red, and black made from a mixture of lampblack diluted with buffalo gall.

[157] Those who have been tattooed are convinced that the signs they wear give them certain supernatural powers, particularly making them invulnerable to bullets and snake bites. During the events of 1941 Siamese soldiers were found wearing white cotton vests covered with cabalistic signs closely related to tattooing. These are a kind of removable tattooing intended to protect those who are wearing them.